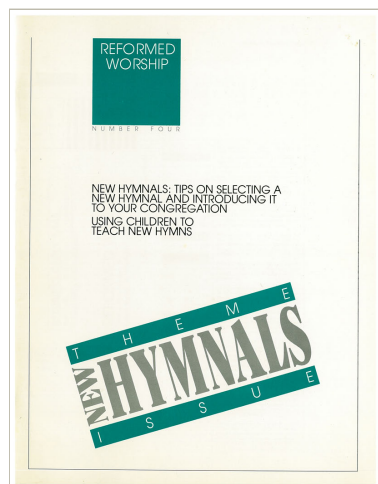


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## PERSPECTIVES

# Writing Hymns: Blood, Sweat, and Prayers

RW 4

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The major task of a hymnal revision committee is to select psalms and hymns for a hymnal. It involves a lengthy, and sometimes laborious, process of sifting through stacks of texts and tunes, selecting those that are both musically and textually excellent and true to the standards of the denomination who will use the hymnal.

But before that process can take place, writers and composers have spent hours on their work, looking for new ways to "sing a new song to the Lord" (Ps. 98). Most of us have heard some of the stories behind hymns—the dramatic conversion that led John Newton to write "Amazing Grace" or the tragic death of his four daughters in an accident at sea that inspired Horatio G. Spafford to write "It Is Well with My Soul." But most songs don't have their roots in some dramatic event. They are the result of inspiration, yes. But they were crafted through careful thought, adherence to a set of guidelines, and just plain hard work. On the following pages three writers reveal something about their work on songs and hymns. Margaret Clarkson discusses six characteristics that make a good hymn; Henrietta TenHarmel describes her experience with versifying a psalm; and Roy Hopp offers some special steps and guidelines unique to the process of composing hymn tunes.

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